

Record high gas prices just before the start of the summer driving season are threatening to stall hopes of an economic recovery. Unrest in the Middle East and North Africa, combined with foreign competition for scarce oil supplies, are said to be the culprit. We cannot control events abroad, but America does have the ability to tap unused energy sources at home. What we lack is the political will to do so.

In Washington, there are basically two approaches to dealing with America's energy dilemma. The Obama administration stubbornly pursues a lopsided policy of walling off access to further U.S. oil and gas drilling, while embracing alternative energy technologies, which are years away, if ever, from becoming significantly viable.

Meanwhile, conservatives in Congress advocate a balanced "all of the above" strategy of developing America's abundant oil and gas reserves while also investing in longer-term viable alternative energy.

America has substantial fossil fuel reserves which remain undeveloped. It is estimated that an equivalent of 19 billion barrels of untapped oil lies buried along our shores and in Alaska. And a staggering 100 trillion cubic feet of American natural gas is untapped, half of it in Alaska. Ironically, no foreign dictator is standing between us and our domestic energy resources, only our president.

For many of us, 2011 seems a repeat of three years ago when pump prices also soared. Back then, the White House took action to open up domestic oil and gas reserves, including drilling along the Atlantic and Pacific coastlines. But the gains of 2008 were short-lived. The new administration raised new barriers to drilling in coastal areas from Maine to Florida, and from Washington to the southern California. Alaska's northern and southern coastlines are also closed to drilling.

Along the Gulf coast, the president's drilling moratorium officially expired in October. Yet, his administration has effectively kept that barrier in place by slowing down the permitting process to a trickle. An estimated 12,000 jobs were lost in our region and if the administration continues to delay new drilling permits, it is believed as many as 25,000 jobs in the Gulf will be eliminated.

Where have those jobs gone? According to the House Energy and Commerce Committee, 12 oil rigs have left the Gulf for friendlier foreign waters, including French Guiana, Nigeria, Egypt, the Congo, and Brazil. Interestingly, President Obama was in Brazil in March hailing that country's development of its oil reserves and pledging U.S. support for that effort.

American jobs and economic growth depend upon access to affordable energy. Unlike our president, Republicans in Congress want to invest in all American energy. Last week, the House passed three separate bills to green light American energy development.

I was pleased to vote for legislation last week to end the administration's de facto moratorium in the Gulf; to require the administration to move ahead with offshore lease sales in the Gulf and off the coast of Virginia; and, to lift the president's ban on offshore drilling along the Atlantic and Pacific coastlines.

Of course, each of these bills continues efforts to explore and exploit domestic resources in an environmentally responsible manner. As we all learned a little over a year ago, adequate safeguards must be enforced.

My staff and I work for you. If we can ever be of service, do not hesitate to call my office toll free at 1-800-288-8721 or visit my website at <http://bonner.house.gov>.